The Builder.

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SATURDAY, JUNE 29, 1850.

LAST week, as on former occasions, we dropped down amongst the members of the Archæological Institute during their congress, that we might gather from their sayings and doings such matter for the delectation of our readers as seemed to promise it. Oxford, the scene of action, is itself a thing pleasant to see; the weather, too, was glorious, and the old colleges and their gardens were never looked at under a clearer air. Magdalen Tower, the Ratcliffe Library, the Church of St. Peter in the East, with its crypt sometimes called Saxon, the Schools where the "Orders" were early introduced, St. Mary's Spire, &c., &c., "hurtle into view, of interest wonderful."

We brought away a couple of memorials, namely, the north transept of Merton Chapel and part of the Old School at Magdalen.* At Merton the stone is much decayed, and this is unfortunately the case with every building in Oxford. The canopies of the niches have fallen off. The cornice over the door contains heads of men, animals, and foliage. The north side of the chancel, partly seen in our view, has boldly projecting buttresses, with large gargoyles. The tracery of the windows is varied in nearly all. The great east window, decorated in style, is the finest in Oxford. Withinside some works are going on; and a portion of the roof has been painted as a specimen card. The date of that portion of the building which we show is 1424, in which year the chapel was re-dedicated.

The temporary Museum of the Institute was formed in the Taylor and Randolph Buildings (illustrated by us in a previous volume), and included some interesting embroidery, vestments, and carving, but it was not so rich as it has been on some previous occasions. The colleges retained their plate and curiosities, and exhibited them in their own place at set times. At New College the crozier of William of Wykeham, with its elaborate canopy work and enamelled ornaments, received particular attention.

At the introductory meeting on the 18th, the principal feature was a learned discourse on the study of Archæology by Mr. C. Newton, wherein, as he said, he endeavoured to present a sketch of the nature and value of oral, written, and monumental evidence, and to show that it was the characteristic of archæological societies to give corporate strength to individuals, and thus become historians of national manners and antiquities. These were the great functions which they had undertaken, and he urged upon them the necessity of carrying them out, and not to forget that archæology only advanced them one stage, supplied one chapter in the whole history of human culture, one link in the chain which held them together in bonds of attachment, but, if followed out, would enable them to span the abyss of time.

The Rev. Vaughan Thomas, Mr. Hallam, and Lord Northampton (the latter fresh from Egypt to the banks of the Isis) spoke afterwards. In the evening the Principal of Brasenose read a paper on

THE UNIVERSITY CHURCH OF ST. MARY,

which all who have visited Oxford know by its beautiful spire and its incongruous though picturesque south porch, with twisted columns, in the High-street. The spire, by the way, has a scaffolding round it, and the upper part of it is being rebuilt. Some of the pinnacles at the foot of it, too, have been restored, or, perhaps, as people differ in opinion as to the propriety of some of the work done, we should say repaired. There was disagreement with the architect who was at first engaged upon it, and now it is in the hands of Mr. Buckler.

The foundation of St. Mary's has been referred to King Alfred. Let this be as it may, the church is mentioned in the Domesday Survey. The paper in question quoted a number of curious letters for funds, addressed to various persons in the early part of the reign of Henry VII., when, after it had been for some time in a ruinous condition, the whole edifice, except the tower and spire, and a small portion eastward of the tower, were entirely rebuilt as it now stands, by means of funds supplied by members of the university, or obtained by the assistance of their friends.

The rebuilding of the church was completed in 1492, the chancel having been erected some years earlier by, or at least at the cost of, Walter Lyhert, or Hart, Provost of Oriel College, and afterwards Bishop of Norwich, who died in 1472.

"Of the architect of the nave and aisles," said the reader, "I know not that we may speak with certainty. The President of Trinity College asserts that Sir Reginald Bray, who was High Steward of the University from 1494 to 1509, was the author of this work. Something may also be ascribed to the well-known reputation of Sir Reginald Bray for skill in architecture. Whether he were the architect of our church or not, we may at least say that the credit of the work would detract nothing from the fame which he has justly acquired by the splendid memorials of his taste and skill to be seen at Malvern and at Windsor.

But whoever the architect of the new building may have been, the church has not come down to our times in the state in which he left it. A few years after its completion in 1492 it suffered severely from a storm, the effects of which have never yet been fully repaired.

All the allusions to this event that I have been able to discover are little more than repetitions of a note by Leland.

The time at which the reparation of these injuries was undertaken may be fixed with greater certainty. Dr. Plot, in his 'Natural History of Oxfordshire,' published in 1677, observes that 'there are many lofty spires about the country as well as city, built all of freestone, and of exquisite workmanship, such as those of Bampton, Witney, Burford, Bloxham, Spilsbury, Kidlington, &c., but that which excels all the rest is the spire of St. Mary's in Oxford, the University Church, the battlements whereof were repaired, and thus set thick with pinnacles as it now stands by Dr. King, then Dean of Christ Church, and Vice-Chancellor of the University,—afterwards Bishop of London.'

Dr. King was Vice-Chancellor of the University from 1607 to 1610, and the architectural style of the pinnacles now standing on the body and chancel of the church, as well as of those which have been recently removed from the base of the spire, corresponds so closely with the work of that period, as to leave no difficulty in the way of accepting Dr. Plot's representation.

The material employed for the construction of the pinnacles put up in the time of Dr. King, being the perishable stone of this neighbourhood, had become much decayed, in the course of two centuries and a half which have passed since their erection. This, in addition to many serious defects in the masonry of the upper portion of the tower, having rendered extensive repairs absolutely necessary, the charge of effecting the required operations has as of old, been undertaken by the University, and it is hoped that in a few months the whole will be completed.

It is evident that the present church, with its noble dimensions and symmetrical design, owes its existence to the necessity for rebuilding the ancient structure. The progress of enlargement by partial re-edification may be traced with considerable distinctness, the tower and spire presenting architecture of more early date than is attributable to any other portion of the edifice. The plan of the ancient edifice which preceded the present church cannot now be ascertained, but the remains of large windows on the east and west sides of the tower evidently show that it was originally intended to stand clear on three out of its four sides."

The south porch, to which we have already alluded, was built in 1637, at a cost of 200*l.*, principally employed in producing ornaments that do not contrast favourably with the delicate fan groining, which is all that remains of the ancient design.

Amongst the papers read on Friday was an interesting biographical notice, by Mr. Britton, of John Carter, the stern champion of Gothic architecture at a time when it had fewer admirers than now. We give the paper in full on another page. At the close of it, Mr. Britton justly complained of the want of a Metropolitan Museum for the preservation of national antiquities. In reply, Lord Northampton, first remarking on the long and useful life of the author of the "Cathedral Antiquities," assured the meeting that the subject had occupied the attention of the trustees of the British Museum, and was still under consideration. Something had been done, and more would follow.

At the same sitting the Rev. J. L. Petit read an account of *Sherborne Church, Dorsetshire*, stating as his excuse for selecting so distant an object, "that as this fine church is now undergoing restoration, it is invested with a more immediate interest, and it is right to direct to it the attention of the antiquary, both that he may notice any evidences of its history developed by the process, and also that he may be enabled to offer such suggestions as may strike him as to retaining or changing any features existing at the time when the work was taken in hand. I say this, as the beautiful south porch has been entirely pulled down, and though it appears that the arcades in the lower part will be reconstructed, as far as possible, with the same individual stones, which are ranged in their order on the grass, still, from a drawing I saw of the proposed restorations, it seems to be the intention of the architect to give the upper part a high-pitched gable and pinnacles, with Norman details, instead of the horizontal parapet, which is familiar to all who are well acquainted with engravings of the building, and which harmonized so well with its general lines: with the exception of this porch, the character of the church, externally, is a not very early Perpendicular, the uniformity of which is owing to its almost complete re-erection shortly after a fire, which happened in the reign of Henry VI. in consequence of a dispute between the monks and the townspeople."

The whole internal length of this church from the western wall to the door of the lady chapel is 200 feet: the height of the choir vaulting is 54 ft. 6 in.: the width of the nave and aisles is 60 ft. 10 in. The roofs are very fine, and in connection with these Mr. Petit offered the following observations on

THE CONSTRUCTION OF VAULTS.

If two equal semi-cylindrical vaults, with springs of equal height, cut each other at right

* See pp. 306 and 307.

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